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ABSTRACT

In 1999, a small Brooklyn middle school in a high-crime neighborhood created the Brownsville Youth for Peace (BYFP) school safety project. The school's students have low test scores, and parents are generally not involved in school activities. BYFP coordinators (school staff, teachers, and students) assessed the nature of the school's safety problems, then developed nine small projects for reducing bullying. Researchers examined project records and interviewed participating teachers, students, staff, the principal, a consultant, and the BYFP's liaison at the New York City Department of Education. Overall, although coordinators thoroughly reviewed the school's safety problems, they were unsure of how to address many of the problems identified, particularly those related to factors outside of school, such as family relationships and neighborhood gangs, which contributed to incidents at school. While the BYFP was initially able to recruit students, teachers, parents, and police officers, it could not maintain the involvement of parents and police because of turnover among people responsible for recruiting participants. Therefore, the project was run primarily by a small, committed group of students and teachers that created the nine safety projects, participated in them, and benefited most from the BYFP. Students who did not work on the project but participated in individual events benefited less. (SM)

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IMPLEMENTING A SCHOOL SAFETY PROJECT

An Evaluation of the I.S. 275 Brownsville Youth for Peace School Safety Project

Milton Mino

Vera Institute of Justice
February 2003

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Executive Summary

Schools across the country have instituted programs to improve the safety of their students, teachers, and staff. While many school districts have developed effective safety programs and a wealth of knowledge about proven safety models has emerged, information about them is often not readily available to other districts that are implementing safety projects. As a result, rather than building on existing safety models or using information about them as a resource, schools often face the challenges of developing and implementing programs on their own.

In the spring of 1999, Intermediate School 275, a small middle school in Brooklyn's Brownsville neighborhood, created the Brownsville Youth for Peace (BYFP) school safety project with a $120,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The school serves a neighborhood with a higher than average crime rate; it has low student test scores, and its students' parents are generally not involved in school activities. The BYFP's coordinators—school staff, teachers, and students—started by assessing the nature of the school's safety problems and then developed nine small projects aimed at reducing student bullying.

Researchers from the Vera Institute of Justice examined how the school implemented the program. The researchers conducted group interviews with students and teachers who worked on the project and individual interviews with the school's principal, teachers, staff, a consultant who worked on the project, and the BYFP's liaison at the New York City Department of Education. They also examined project records, including a study on the school's safety problems.

The issues that I.S. 275 faced in implementing its project are common, and the school's experience has implications for other schools planning safety programs. Vera researchers learned that although the project coordinators conducted a thorough review of the school's safety problems, they were unsure of how to address many of the problems they identified, particularly those that related to factors outside of school, such as family relationships and neighborhood gangs, that contributed to incidents at school. The researchers also learned that while the BYFP was initially able to recruit students, teachers, parents, and police officers from the local precinct, it was unable to maintain the involvement of the latter two groups because of turnover among people responsible for recruiting participants for the project. As a result, the project was run primarily by a small, committed group of students and teachers. This group created the nine safety projects, participated in them, and benefited most from the BYFP, while students who did not work on the project but participated in individual events benefited less.

If I.S. 275 had had access to additional information about programs that similar schools have implemented with comparable budgets, project coordinators would have been able to connect the safety problems they identified with a range of potential solutions.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Sheila Gay-Robbins, senior assistant to the executive director, Office of School Safety and Planning, New York City Department of Education, for providing Vera with records and information about I.S. 275 and its school safety project. I also thank I.S. 275's principal, Priscilla Williams, for allowing us to interview students and staff at the school. Finally, I am grateful to my Vera colleagues Ajay Khashu, Janet Mandelstam, Hema Sareen, Meryl Schwartz, Melorra Sochet, and Christopher Stone for their valuable insights; Brenner Brown for her editing; and Leah Edmunds and Suzanne Mueller for their assistance in preparing this report.

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Introduction and Background

Schools across the country have implemented safety programs to improve the security of their students, teachers, and staff. These programs range in size from small projects run by school volunteers to large projects with paid staff. Some work only within the school and others form partnerships with local community groups, business associations, and police precincts. A middle school in Miami, for example, recently created a project in which police officers and school staff visited students' parents at home to reduce student truancy.[1]

Though the programs schools develop vary according to the types of safety problems schools face and how much funding they have, schools face similar issues when they implement their programs. For example, what kinds of safety projects should they create? How should they recruit participants to work on a project and then keep them involved? What role can teachers play in the project? Many schools have developed effective programs that address these and other issues, but information about them is not widely circulated to other schools. As a result, rather than using information about proven safety models as a resource, people who work on school safety often face the challenges of implementing projects on their own. Moreover, taxpayers and private funders often prefer that schools invest their resources in implementing programs that have demonstrated effectiveness, but information about small tested programs is hard to find.[2]

This report examines how one small middle school in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, Intermediate School 275, implemented its safety program. While each school is unique, I.S. 275's experience offers lessons for schools interested in improving their safety. It also shows the need to connect people working on school safety with resources that can help them, such as information about programs that have worked at other schools, additional training, and technical assistance. These resources seem especially key in schools like I.S. 275, which work in disadvantaged areas with higher than average crime rates, have low standardized tests scores, and where few parents are active in school issues.

In the spring of 1999, I.S. 275 created a school safety project, named the Brownsville Youth for Peace (BYFP) by its student and teacher participants, with a $120,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). The BYFP was meant to operate at the school for one year, from January 1999 to December 1999, but for the reasons discussed in this report, the grant period was extended without additional funds through May 2002. The project's initial goals were broadly defined as "reducing violence and the prevalence of weapons at school" and were later redefined as "reducing student bullying." A condition of the BYFP's grant from the COPS Office was to evaluate its safety

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[1] Shellie Solomon and Craig Uchida, *Evaluation of the Miami Police Department 1998 School Based Partnership Grant*, Silver Springs, MD: 21st Century Solutions, Inc., 2001.

[2] Delbert Elliot, et al. *Safe Communities-Safe Schools Planning Guide: A Tool for Community Violence Prevention Efforts.* Boulder, CO: Institute of Behavioral Science, Regent of the University of Colorado, 2000; and Delbert Elliot et al., *Safe Communities-Safe School Guide to Effective Program Selection: A Tool for Community Violence Prevention Efforts,* Boulder, CO: Institute of Behavioral Science, Regent of the University of Colorado, 2002.

program. Accordingly, the school, through the New York City Department of Education, contracted the Vera Institute of Justice to evaluate the initiative.

This report examines how the school implemented its safety program. We do not evaluate the impact of the BYFP or that of the nine safety projects that resulted from the initiative. Most of the projects, such as a student performance on violence and a retreat to discuss bullying, were small and lasted only a few days. Because the projects were implemented over two and a half years, while other changes that could affect safety also occurred, we cannot isolate the impact of individual projects from the effect of other factors.

This report is organized into four sections. This section discusses the study's methodology and limitations and presents an overview of I.S. 275. The next section examines how the school identified safety problems, what it found, and how it used the findings to create safety projects and describes the projects the participants developed. The third section examines how BYFP members recruited participants—how they defined the project's stakeholders, how recruitment varied across prospective groups, and the effects of student graduation and staff turnover on the project. We conclude with a discussion and recommendations based on I.S. 275's experience.

Research methods and limitations

To assess the school's implementation of the project, we conducted individual and group interviews with the project's members. We conducted separate tape-recorded group interviews with three teachers and seven students who attended the school at different periods over the project's two and a half years and individual interviews with the school's principal, the coordinator of student affairs (COSA), a consultant who worked on the project during the first year, and with the project's liaison at the New York City Department of Education. We also reviewed the group interview notes and survey results of a study that the project commissioned during its first year on the nature and location of school safety incidents, student perceptions of safety, and causes of student conflict that exist outside of school. Finally, we examined the project's records, including progress reports, attendance records, memos to participants, and recruitment letters sent to parents and students.

Our evaluation was limited in three ways. First, we interviewed participants at the end of the project rather than throughout its implementation. We attended some of the fall 1999 group interviews with students and teachers, but because of the limited funds available for the evaluation, we were unable to follow the project throughout its implementation. Doing so would have allowed us to document firsthand how project members responded to the issues discussed in this report, observe how the project evolved, and potentially identify how other factors also affected its implementation. We tried to minimize these limitations by interviewing project members who had worked on the BYFP throughout the period studied and by examining project records that covered its duration. Second, we did not interview students and teachers who did not participate in the project. This group could have helped us understand how students and teachers who did not participate in the BYFP perceived the project, how much they knew about it, and their reasons for not participating. Finally, our evaluation does not examine how the school

allocated its $120,000 grant, including how much the safety projects cost to develop or how much the school spent on consultants and overtime pay for teachers.

Overview of I.S. 275

Most of I.S. 275's students live in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, where the school is located. The area is troubled by higher than average rates of poverty and crime.[3] In 1999, when the project launched, 61 percent of the neighborhood's residents lived at or below the poverty level.[4]

In 2001, 723 children were enrolled in the school's grades six through eight.[5] According to the New York Sate Education Department, 85 percent of the students are African-American and 13 percent are Latino.[6] Six percent of students are immigrants, primarily from Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. The students are poor—91 percent of them are eligible for free lunch, versus 71 percent of all middle school students. The school had 24 incidents per 1,000 students that involved the police department in 2001, more than three times the city's average. [7]

The school's academic performance is lower than that of other middle schools. Only nine percent of students passed the math section of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills exam, compared with 26 percent of their counterparts citywide, and 22 percent passed the language arts exam, versus 34 percent of all middle school students.[8] In December 2000, the State Education Commissioner designated I.S. 275, along with 24 other middle schools statewide, as a School Under Registration Review (SURR). Since 1989, the New York State Education Department has designated low-performing schools as SURR schools, a category that places them at risk of being closed if their academic scores do not improve. In 2001, 52 teachers worked at the school, two-thirds of them fully licensed and permanently assigned to teach there, and slightly more than half had more than five years of teaching experience, which is average for city teachers.[9] More than half of them have at least five years of teaching experience, which is also average for city teachers.

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[3] Based on New York City Police Department CompStat Unit statistics for the 73rd precinct, available at http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/pct/cspdf.html.

[4] Calculated from statistics provided on the U.S. Census Bureau's web site, http://factfinder.census.gov.

[5] Division of Assessment and Accountability, New York State Education Department, *2000-2001 Annual School Report: I.S. 275,* Division of Assessment and Accountability, 2002.

[6] Ibid. Citywide, 34 percent of middle school students are African-American, 12 percent are Latino, and 16 percent are white. Less than one percent of I.S. 275's students are white.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid. The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, or CTB, is a standard exam administered to New York City public school students.

[9] Ibid. Citywide, three-quarters of middle school teachers are fully licensed and permanently assigned to their school.

Identifying Safety Problems and Developing Responses

The BYFP's model, structure, and duration

To implement its project, the school used the four-stage S.A.R.A. model, which is commonly used in safety programs and was suggested by the COPS Office as the model I.S. 275 should use. The model's name stands for scanning, analysis, response, and assessment. During the model's scanning stage, participants collect data on the types of safety problems at the school and where they occur.[10] Next, they review their findings during the analysis stage, often redefining the problem they want to address on the basis of what they have learned. They then create tailored safety projects to address the problems during the response stage and assess their impact in the final phase.[11]

Students and teachers participated in the BYFP directly and indirectly. Those who took part in the former manner were project members who helped develop and coordinate safety projects and also often participated in them. An example are students who attended BYFP meetings, developed a student bullying retreat as a safety response, and later also attended the event. Although individual students and staff involved in the BYFP changed because of graduation and turnover, on average, about a dozen students and three teachers worked on the BYFP each year. These participants were in addition to the school's principal, its COSA—a teacher assigned to work with students on extra-curricular events, such as school clubs, student performances, and class trips—and the Department of Education liaison, all of whom helped develop and coordinate the safety projects. Most students and teachers participated indirectly in the BYFP as participants in its safety projects. For instance, students and teachers schoolwide participated in a classroom-based project to reinforce positive behavior, but did not develop or implement the initiative.

Although the people directly involved in the BYFP worked collaboratively to problem-solve and to run the project, I.S. 275's principal, the COSA, and Department of Education liaison were the main people who managed the project's implementation and coordinated events. The COSA, teachers who worked on the BYFP after school, and the liaison at the Department of Education, who was a staff person in the Division of School Safety, were paid through the grant to work on the project.

The BYFP was meant to operate at I.S 275 for one year. However, it had problems recruiting members to work on the project during its first year and so it received a one-year extension to its grant from the COPS Office. By the end of the second year, the project had not used all of its grant funds and so, with another one-year extension, it continued for a third year. The project did not receive additional funding with either extension.

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[10] Throughout this report we use the term scanning to refer to the project's identification of safety problems as part of the S.A.R.A. model. We do not use it to mean checking students for weapons with metal detectors, as the term is also commonly used.

[11] John E. Eck and William Spelman, *Problem Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, and Police Executive Research Forum, 1987.

Identifying safety problems

At the start of the spring 1999 semester, the BYFP commissioned a psychology professor from Brooklyn's Long Island University (LIU) to conduct an assessment of the school's safety. The professor and her graduate students had previously conducted research at I.S. 275 and were familiar with the school, its staff, and its students. Their study examined three areas—where incidents occur, students' perceptions of safety, and why students commit safety offenses.

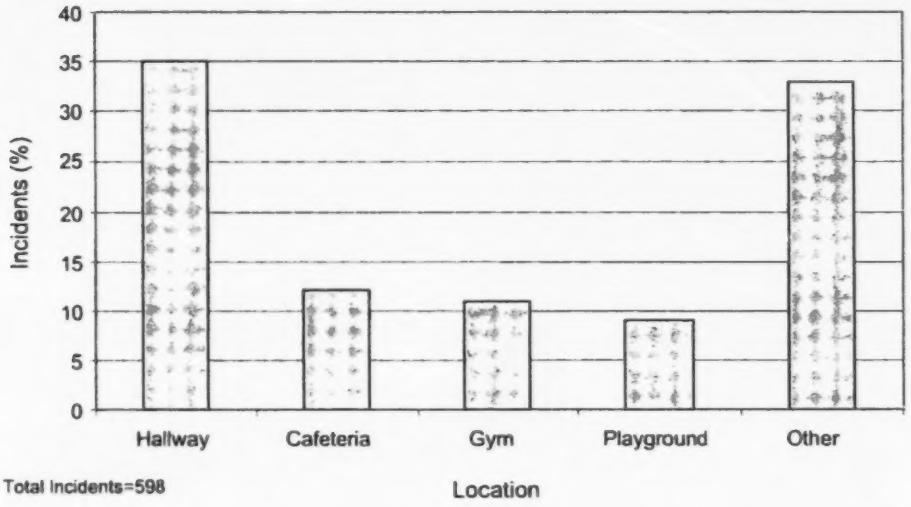
The LIU consultant asked students where safety incidents occurred—whether they took place inside or outside of the school. This information was meant to provide a "snapshot" of the existing problems so that the group could then devise safety projects to address them. It was not meant to be a longitudinal study that tracked how safety at the school changed over time or as a result of the project. The LIU consultant also surveyed students about their perceptions of the school's safety and reasons why some of them committed safety offenses. Specifically, the survey asked students about how safe they felt at school, their exposure to violence while in and away from school, their behavior, and the quality of their relationships with their mother or primary guardian. The consultant also conducted group interviews with students, teachers, parents, and police officers from the 73rd police precinct, which covers the school.

Members of the BYFP, including students and teachers, helped conduct the group interviews and distribute the survey. They interviewed 267 students (104 girls and 163 boys)—about one-third of the school. Twenty-seven percent and 39 percent of the students were in the sixth and seventh grades, respectively, and 34 percent were in the eighth grade.

Two-thirds of all of the incidents that the students reported occurred in the hallway, cafeteria, gym, or playground (Figure 2-1). They reported being the victims of 598 incidents, ranging from harassment to robbery, of which being hit or threatened were the most common (Figure 2-2). Combined, these two incidents comprised 38 percent of all the incidents that they reported. Almost 70 percent of them felt safest when they were in their classrooms or in the gym, while 20 percent said they felt secure everywhere in school (Figure 2-3). Also, most students felt safest with their friends, teachers, or a school safety agent (Figure 2-4).

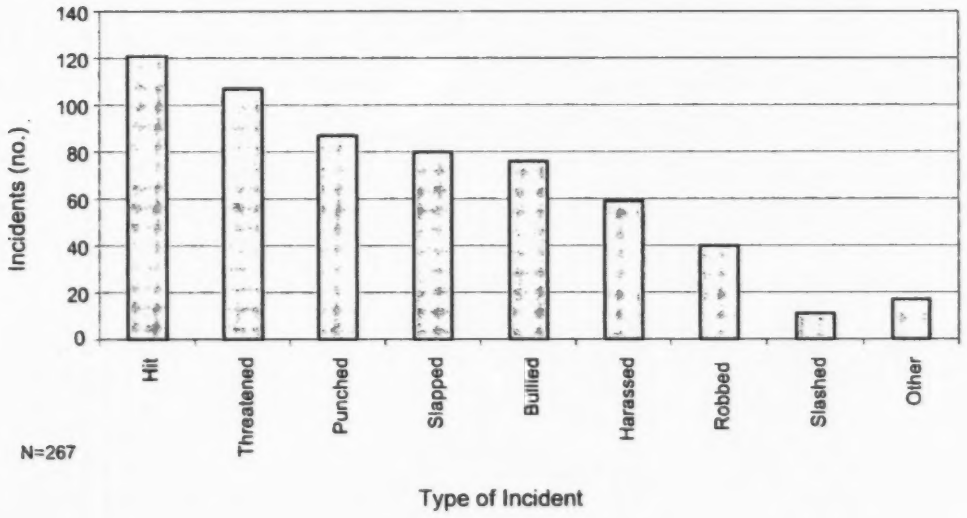
The following graphs show select results from the LIU consultants' study, as presented in their report to the BYFP.

Figure 2-1 Percentage of Incidents That Occurred at Various Locations



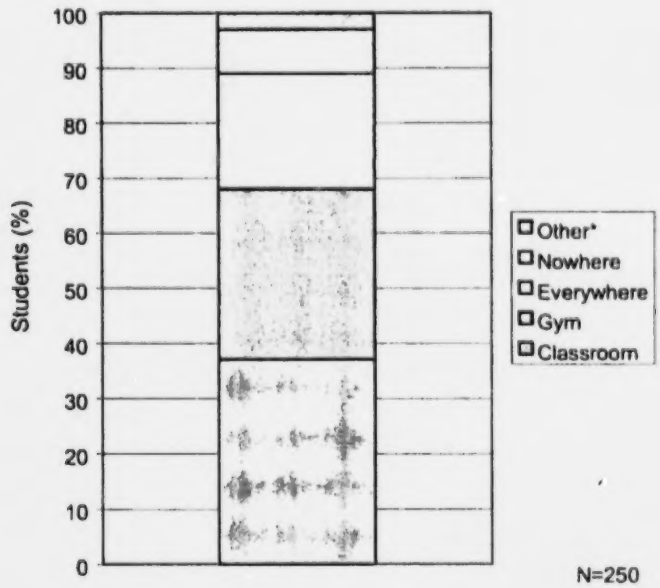
Total Incidents=598

Figure 2-2 Number and Type of Incidents Reported by Students



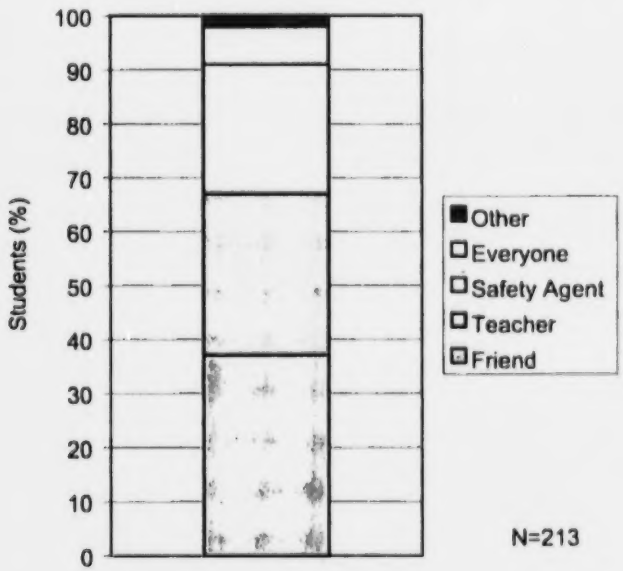
N=267

Figure 2-3 Percentage of Students Who Said They Felt Safest at Various Locations



*Other refers to the lunchroom, auditorium, or homeroom.

Figure 2-4 Percentage of Students Who Said They Felt Safest With Various People



The consultants found that students felt safer while they were in school than when they were outside of it and that environmental factors, such as local public housing buildings, neighborhood gangs, and family relationships, were related to incidents that occurred at school. During group interviews, students identified Rockaway Avenue, where the school is located, as one of the main locations of incidents. They also found that two areas close to the school—Noble Ali Drew Plaza and Marcus Garvey Housing Development—were main locations of gangs and crime that affected safety, and many of the bullying and harassment incidents were committed there. Four neighborhood areas were identified as "hot spots," in each of which students reported more than 70 incidents of fights, bullying, or intimidation. The consultant mapped these and other locations where crime and harassment against students were most common. They also mapped where incidents occurred inside the school, showing the classes and hallways where fights, bullying, and other incidents were concentrated. Despite the police department's school safety corridor program, students felt most anxious about their safety outside of school, when returning to their homes. In fact, two-thirds of them said they felt safer at school than away from school, a finding consistent with national student surveys.[12]

The LIU researchers concluded that students' exposure to violence, both as a victim and a witness, was significantly associated with their negative behavior in school. They also found that family and neighborhood factors, such as local gangs, poor relations with mothers, how parents react to their child's emotions, and exposure to violence at home, all contributed to students' acting up in school. On the basis of these findings, the LIU consultants recommended that parents and the community become more aware of students' exposure to violence and that the BYFP take steps to reduce this exposure, but they did not specify what remedies the school should take.

Developing school safety projects

The consultants' finding that student behavior is often caused by nonschool-based issues is consistent with other studies. Nonschool-based factors affect school safety directly and indirectly. For example, school fights are often the culmination of events that begin in a student's neighborhood.[13] Conversely, neighborhood-based incidents often reflect events that begin at school.[14] Understanding how external factors affect school environments and creating responses aimed outside the school are important aspects of improving safety.

Beginning in September 1999 and continuing throughout the fall 2000 semester, BYFP participants met weekly to examine the LIU study and to discuss possible projects that the school could implement to address the problems it found. They concluded that although external factors that affected school safety were important, they fell outside of the project's scope and financial

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[12] Phillip Kaufman et al., *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2001*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001.

[13] Pedro Mateu-Gelabert, *School Violence: The Bi-Directional Conflict Flow Between Neighborhood and School*, New York: Vera Institute of Justice, July 2000.

[14] Ibid.

resources and were therefore issues that the BYFP could not address. The project's leaders decided that the BYFP should instead focus on problems inside the school, which they considered more feasible for a school-based safety project to target.

Thus, although the scanning study correctly identified the school's safety problems and what contributes to them, the project's leaders, unsure of how to tackle them, focused on campus-based incidents. When we asked if the safety problems that the study found were those they expected, one project member said, "I believe it was broader than we expected because, frankly, we had $120,000 and one year and when we did our...analysis report, we realized we had so many issues—it was like, which issues can we choose?...So we decided we'll work with the inside [of] the school. We'll work on the culture inside the school."

BYFP's safety responses

Relying on the LIU study's finding that many of the safety incidents, including weapon possessions and fights, were committed by school bullies, the BYFP revised its initial goal of reducing the number of weapons and violent incidents at school to reducing bullying among students. The project members reasoned that this strategy would also reduce weapons and violent incidents and would therefore address the cause of safety incidents rather than the symptoms, an approach consistent with the S.A.R.A. model. According to one of the project's leaders, before beginning the scanning stage, the BYFP thought that fighting and weapons were the most common safety problems. "But when we looked at the data," she said, "it didn't show that that was the problem. It showed the problems...were a lot of he-said-she-said arguments that turned into fights—and a lot of bullying. So we started to reexamine what we were going to respond to."

The BYFP developed nine safety projects that were meant to reduce student bullying directly and indirectly. Seven of the projects were aimed at students and two worked with both students and teachers. They were implemented throughout the project's two and a half years and varied in length, some lasting only a day and others spanning the full project period. They also differed in how many students they reached—some projects were instituted schoolwide and others targeted select groups.

Examples of the day-long projects include a student peace summit and a "Turn in Your Weapons" Day. These projects were aimed at students and teachers schoolwide to encourage discussions about violence and to eliminate real and toy weapons at school, respectively. In a poster contest, another short-term project, students created posters showing peace and school unity.

In contrast to these one-time or brief projects, the BYFP also developed two programs that occurred throughout the two-year project—the Keisha and Happygram programs. Both used positive reinforcement techniques to improve student behavior. In the Happygram program, teachers and staff assigned points to students for good behavior. Students later redeemed the points at the school's "Keisha store" for sneakers, shirts, and other gifts. The Keisha project used the same rewards-based approach but assigned points to classes rather than to individual

students. Graphs showing how many points classes accumulated were displayed in the halls. Both projects were popular among students and, unlike the other projects, also incorporated teachers schoolwide, offering them a way to use positive reinforcement techniques to influence student behavior.

Thirty-five students a year performed in *Who Will be Next*, an ongoing student dramatization on violence. They performed at school assemblies and later on television on the "Apollo Theatre Amateur Night" and "Queen Latifah" shows. The project was first run by the Educational Network of Artists in Creative Theater (ENACT), a New York City-based nonprofit organization that fosters emotional and social learning and behavior change through drama and the arts, and later by the school's COSA.[15]

To reduce bullying, the BYFP created a weekly workshop for 35 students identified as bullies by the school's guidance counselors and teachers. The project also actively recruited student bullies to work on the BYFP. During the scanning stage, these students participated in a group interview with only bullies and in an interview with other students. Student bullies later reviewed the study's findings and helped create safety programs. The BYFP's goals in including student bullies were to use their insights into bullying to develop effective projects for bullies as well as to try to improve their behavior by giving them an opportunity to play a positive role at the school. According to the students that we interviewed—bullies and nonbullies—this was an effective way to improve the behavior of disruptive students.

The following table summarizes the nine projects, their duration, participants, and who coordinated them.

[15] See http://www.enact.org for more information about ENACT.

Table 2-1 Projects Developed for I.S. 275's Safety Initiative, 1999–2002

Safety Project	Description	Participants	Duration	Who ran project
Keisha points	Classes are awarded points for good behavior that they can trade for gifts at the school's "Keisha store."	Students and teachers schoolwide	Spring 1999 to present	COSA
Happygram	Individual students receive Keisha points that they can trade at the Keisha store.	Students and teachers schoolwide	Spring 1999 to present	COSA
Workshops for bullies	Workshops that engaged bullies in discussions about their behavior at school.	35 students	Weekly, October 2000 to May 2001	COSA and Board of Education liaison
Who Will be Next?	Student dramatization on school violence performed at assemblies, on television, and at presentations to the COPS Office on school safety projects.	Approximately 36 students, four teachers, and a school safety agent	Ongoing	ENACT, an off-campus group, and later the COSA
Student retreat	Activities that engaged students in discussions about bullying.	28 students	One weekend during fall 2002	COSA and Board of Education liaison
"Turn in Weapons" Day	Students turned in toy guns and knives as symbolic gestures of their desire for a safe school.	Schoolwide	One day, spring 1999	COSA, principal, and Board of Education liaison
Student peace summit	Day-long event to encourage safety. Activities included sports and speeches by principal and students on safety.	Schoolwide	One day, spring 2000	COSA, principal, and Board of Education liaison
Poster contest	Contest to create a poster symbolizing school unity and peace.	Schoolwide	May 2000	COSA, principal, and Board of Education liaison
Safety brochure for parents	Information on effective ways of talking to kids about violence and school safety, accompanied by a letter from the principal describing the BYFP and asking them to join.	Mailed to all parents	One mailing during fall 2002	Principal

Recruiting and Retaining Project Participants

In its grant proposal the BYFP identified its "stakeholders," or prospective participants, as students, teachers, staff, parents, and community affairs police officers from the local precinct. In this section we examine how the BYFP recruited each of these groups, the issues unique to engaging each of them, and the effects of staff turnover on sustaining participants' involvement. We also discuss the principal's role in implementing the project at the school.

Recruiting participants is a key part of implementing and running a school safety project. Participants bring skills and resources to the projects they work on, and when members from different perspectives—for example, students, teachers, and parents—work on projects, it helps them develop a collaborative and presumably more effective way to improve safety.[16] Recruitment can also be one of the hardest parts of running a project. Members are usually unpaid and have jobs, children, and other obligations that make it difficult for them to volunteer. After participants are recruited, the project has to sustain their involvement. This is difficult because students graduate or transfer to other schools and because there can be significant turnover among project staff. At schools like I.S. 275, where almost no parents are active in the school, recruiting is even more challenging.

Recruiting students

Students worked on the BYFP throughout the project and were its most active members, playing key roles in developing and participating in the safety responses. Some students who worked on the BYFP and later graduated returned to help run the new safety projects.

Starting in February 1999, when the project began, the school's principal and coordinator of student activities recruited students to work on the BYFP. They recruited both students who had already shown an interest in working on school issues and those from the school at large. The principal and COSA spoke about the BYFP to students who were part of a school leadership group (a class unrelated to the project) and to students who had worked on the project's grant proposal the year before. They recruited from a broader group of students during lunch periods, describing the BYFP to students and asking them to join. The COSA recruited most of the students during the second and third years. As the teacher responsible for running the school's after-school events, she knew students who were interested in school issues. In addition, I.S. 275's location worked in its favor in recruiting students. Because the school is located in the neighborhood where students live, it was convenient for students to stay after school or to run projects after they graduated.

In all, about a dozen students worked on the project each year, including those who had previously committed safety offenses and were considered to be bullies by staff and other students. These students ran and participated in group interviews during the scanning stage and

[16] Delbert Elliot et al., *Safe Communities-Safe Schools Planning Guide: A Tool for Community Violence Prevention Efforts*, Boulder, CO: Institute of Behavioral Science, Regent of the University of Colorado, 2000.

later reviewed the study and worked with adult project members to create the nine safety projects. Although the project's planners did not estimate how many students they expected to work on the BYFP, they considered a dozen each year a manageable number given the project's size.

Recruiting parents

Parents at I.S. 275 generally are not active in the school. Few participate in after-school events, attend parent-teacher meetings, or participate in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). According to I.S. 275's principal, who sent a letter to parents asking them to join the project, many of them have children to care for, jobs, and other responsibilities that make it difficult to work on after-school events. These issues also limited their involvement in the BYFP. With the exception of the project's first semester, parents did not work on the program or attend its events.

The school's PTA president was the project's link to parents during the first semester and drew about 40 of them to BYFP's spring 1999 "kick-off" ceremony. She left the PTA the next semester, however, and was replaced by a parent who was less involved in the project. The new president attended only a couple of the fall 2000 project meetings, recruited few parents, and left the BYFP by the semester's end. Being a neighborhood school did not help I.S. 275 recruit parents for the project.

Recruiting teachers

Three teachers worked on the project each year, in addition to the COSA. This was fewer than the project leaders expected. They noted that many teachers face the same obstacles as parents in working on after-school projects—child care and other personal obligations.

To encourage them to join, the BYFP paid teachers through the grant for their after-school work. Those who participated helped conduct group interviews during the scanning stage, created and ran the safety projects, and identified students they thought would want to join the program. According to the teachers we interviewed, the BYFP was a way for them to work with students outside of the classroom, a goal to which they were already committed. As one teacher explained, "We did this because that's how we are...we saw that it fit in with the Brownsville Youth for Peace, and what their mission was. So we just continued to do what we were doing."

Recruiting local police officers and school safety agents

Officers from the local precinct, including the captain, worked with the school to obtain funding for the project. When the BYFP launched, he assigned a community officer to work with them. The officer attended project meetings, and spoke to parents, teachers, and students during the spring 1999 kick-off ceremony. After the captain's transfer to another precinct the next semester, the officer attended fewer meetings and eventually stopped working on the project. According to project members, the new captain did not assign someone to the project, despite their attempts to involve the precinct.

I.S. 275's five school safety agents (SSAs) participated in a group interview during the scanning stage and attended the project's events. One of them participated in the student performance on violence. They did not develop or run any of the safety programs, however, and had limited involvement beyond these roles. According to one staff member, the December 1999 transfer of school safety agents from the New York City Board of Education to the NYPD created confusion about who could authorize the SSAs to work on the project.

Student graduation and staff turnover

The BYFP relied on individual project members to recruit participants and to keep them involved. These individuals used their contacts and personal relationships to encourage prospective participants to join the BYFP. For example, the initial PTA president's access to parents helped her recruit parents, and the COSA's familiarity with students helped her encourage students to participate. While this was initially effective, it also meant that when these individuals left their position or the school, the project's links to participants were cut and were sometimes not reestablished.

The turnover among students because of graduation, transfers to other schools, dropping out, or other reasons also had an impact on the program. Most of the students who worked on the BYFP were from the school's older classes and so many graduated and left the school after working on the project for a few semesters. As a result, the BYFP had to regularly recruit and train new students, especially at the beginning of the school year.

Support from I.S. 275's principal

School safety programs sometimes encounter reluctance from school administrators to discuss the extent or types of safety problems at their schools. A safety program supported by the COPS Office at Luther Burbank Middle School in Los Angeles, for instance, had little communication with the school's administrators, and, according to the researchers who evaluated the project, its members were discouraged from talking about some of the safety problems they found during the scanning stage.[17]

By contrast, I.S. 275's principal played an active role in the BYFP throughout its implementation. She helped obtain the project's grant and provided the school resources needed to run the BYFP. For example, she supplied space in the school for the "Keisha store," regularly met with project members, and helped with recruitment by writing a letter to parents about the BYFP and asking them to join. Moreover, programs that required that teachers schoolwide participate, such as the Keisha points and Happygram projects, could not have been instituted without her authorization. Her relationship with students also helped the BYFP with its recruitment. One member said, "Even though she's the principal, a lot of kids look to her for guidance and the things they might not have outside the school. They'll refer to her as 'mother,' so it's [out of] a sense of loyalty to her that the kids want to be involved."

Conclusions and Lessons

I.S. 275 faced several obstacles in implementing its project. For example, the project coordinators had problems recruiting participants and were unsure of how they could address some of the safety problems they identified during the safety assessment. As a result, only some of the school's "stakeholder" groups took part in the program and the projects that the BYFP developed had limited reach. Also, the project's benefits for students and teachers varied according to the extent of their involvement. A small number of students and teachers coordinated the BYFP and were directly involved in creating the nine safety projects. Most of the school took part only indirectly, as participants in the projects. In this section we discuss the BYFP's benefits for these two groups, how the project sought to reduce bullying, and the obstacles that group members faced in implementing the program. Because safety projects often face these issues, I.S. 275's experience is valuable to other schools and planners as they consider how to implement their programs.

Benefits for "direct" participants

The students and teachers who worked on the BYFP benefited more from the program than those who only participated in some of its nine safety projects. The dozen students and three teachers a year who were directly involved in the BYFP assessed the school's safety problems and helped create and manage programs, in most cases for the first time. They spoke highly of the BYFP and the chance it gave them to work on school issues—a goal to which they were already committed. Many of these students also participated in the nine safety projects. For example, they took part in the student performance on school violence, performing at school assemblies, on television, and in Washington, D.C., for the COPS Office. According to students, these were new and enjoyable experiences that gave them a comprehensive view of how school safety projects work—from assessing problems and creating responses, to participating in the projects they helped develop.

Benefits for "indirect" participants

Most of the school's students and staff, however, did not work on the program and were involved only indirectly as participants in some of the safety projects. These students and teachers received the program's "services" through schoolwide initiatives such as the Happygram and Keisha projects. In these projects, teachers used positive reinforcement techniques in their classrooms to reward students for their good behavior. These techniques, which had not previously been available to teachers in the school, may have improved students' conduct.

Projects that were not instituted schoolwide or that lasted only a day benefited fewer students. Reaching the school community beyond a small group of committed students, teachers, and staff would have required implementing more long-term and schoolwide safety responses. Moreover, while we did not interview students and staff from the school at large, it is likely that

many of those who took part in the projects were unaware of the BYFP, especially during the project's second and third years.

Reducing student bullying

The BYFP did not have a cohesive strategy to reduce bullying, its main goal. Some projects, such as the workshops with 35 students considered to be bullies and the retreat, as well as the effort to actively recruit bullies to work on the BYFP, directly addressed the program's goal, but others, such as the poster contest and peace summit, did not. The latter activities were short-term or one-day events meant to improve overall school safety. They may have improved student behavior, but they did not directly address bullying. Moreover, despite project leaders' active recruitment of bullies, the students who volunteered to work on the project regularly were likely not the school's most disruptive students.

A more effective way for the BYFP to advance its goal would have been to create projects that specifically targeted bullying. Developing a logic model, a commonly used tool that shows how a program will achieve its desired outcome, could have helped the BYFP determine whether and how proposed safety projects would address their objective.

Obstacles to creating school safety initiatives

The BYFP encountered two main obstacles in implementing its project—a lack of information about the types of school safety programs that have been successful in other schools and difficulty keeping some of its participant groups involved. School safety programs commonly face these issues. Moreover, schools that have not worked on safety projects before, that have low student test scores, few active parents, and that serve communities with high crime and poverty rates face additional obstacles in implementing their programs. These schools are often the ones most in need of safety programs and yet may be the least equipped to implement them effectively without extra resources. Because of the obstacles these schools face, ongoing technical assistance and training can help them carry out their projects effectively.

Linking problems to tested solutions. The BYFP conducted a thorough review of the school's safety problems and learned that many of the causes of student violence were the result of factors outside the school. They were unsure of how a school-based program with a relatively small budget could address these problems and so they focused on issues inside the school instead. Other studies have also shown that school violence is often related to social and neighborhood factors. The BYFP's decision to address only school-based issues limited the project's reach and potential impact.

Although school initiatives that address non-campus-based issues are not common, other schools with budgets comparable to I.S. 275's have created such programs. For example, in a school safety project at Miami's Booker T. Washington Middle School, funded by a $139,000 COPS grant, police officers and a school staff person made house visits to parents to reduce student truancy. The school is located in Miami-Dade County and, like I.S. 275, serves students

who are poor—more than three-quarters receive free or reduced-cost lunch. The school and the Miami Police Department considered truants to be at high risk of dropping out of school and believed that some of them had committed crimes in the area while cutting class. Using the S.A.R.A. model, the project targeted students with more than 40 unexcused absences, double the school's average. Police officers or a school staff person visited parents at their homes and told them about their child's truancy, requested their help in getting the child to attend school, provided them with information about social services, and tried to identify reasons why the child cut class.[18]

The BYFP could have reached more students and had a greater impact if it had designed programs that primarily targeted teachers and staff in addition to ones that were focused on students. Teachers and staff work and interact with students daily. They witness arguments that can escalate into fights and may be aware of factors that affect a student's behavior and school performance. Staff development is vital to school safety efforts and can take many forms.[19] Some schools and districts offer knowledge-based workshops, cultural sensitivity training, and school security and disciplinary policies; others promote skills-based training on topics ranging from effective classroom management to intervening in a fight.[20] Schools have also trained teachers in conflict resolution, positive reinforcement techniques, and classroom management as ways of improving safety.[21] I.S. 275's teachers could have reached more students if they had received training in conflict resolution skills, for instance, because they would have used these tactics with their students, most of whom were not part of the BYFP. Furthermore, investing resources in helping teachers develop more effective ways of preempting or mitigating safety problems is also a way to make an impact on a school's safety beyond a project's implementation stage

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[18] Shellie Solomon and Craig Uchida, *Evaluation of the Miami Police Department 1998 School Based Partnership Grant*, 21st Century Solutions, Inc., 2001.

[19] S. Kadel and J. Follman, *Reducing School Violence*, Palatka, FL: South Eastern Regional Vision for Education, 1993.

[20] Robert Linquanti and Beth Ann Berliner, *Rebuilding Schools as Safe Havens: A Typology for Selecting and Integrating Violence Prevention Strategies*, Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1994.

[21] An example of a program that focuses on teachers is the School Transitional Environment Program (STEP), which is based on studies showing that stressful life events, such as changing schools, can place children at risk for maladaptive behaviors. The program trains homeroom teachers to work with students transitioning between schools. Students are assigned to homerooms in which all classmates are STEP participants and teachers are trained to act as guidance counselors, helping students choose classes, counseling them regarding school and personal problems, and notifying parents of student absences. The program has been used with students who attend large, urban middle and high schools with multiple feeder schools and that serve predominantly non-white, lower-income students. The program has been shown to decrease student absenteeism, improve grades and create positive feelings about the school. *Source:* Robert D. Felner and Angela M. Adan, "The School Environment Project: An Ecological Intervention and Evaluation." In *14 Ounces of Prevention: A Casebook for Practitioners*, edited by R.H. Price et al., Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1988. Another example that requires considerably fewer resources is a program called Conflict Resolution: A Curriculum for Youth Providers. This model, developed for middle schools, is a curriculum teachers can integrate into their regular lesson plans. The program's 56 lessons, taught over the semester, help students define conflict, teach conflict resolution skills, and review basic communication behavior. *Source:* Sochet, Melorra, *The Nuts and Bolts of Implementing School Safety Programs*, New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2000.

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because teachers are likely to be involved in a safety project longer than students, who graduate, transfer, or otherwise leave school.

Information about what other schools have done to improve safety would have helped the BYFP link the problems they found with programs that have worked at other schools. This information could have also helped them determine whether the best school-based responses to the problems they found in the scanning assessment were to target bullying rather than the most serious offenses or to address something else. As part of the scanning study, the BYFP could have also asked students what types of problems the project should focus on. Even if the BYFP ultimately decided not to address external problems or to create projects only for teachers, they would have made their decision after reviewing the range of options available to them—for example, the programs that other schools have used in similar settings, their effectiveness, how to implement them, and their cost.

Without these resources, addressing many of the problems schools uncover can seem a task too broad, expensive, and complex for even the most dedicated and creative group of people. While these resources exist and a wealth of knowledge and literature on effective school safety practices has emerged, this information is not always circulated among schools working on safety projects.[22] As a result, rather than adapting and testing an existing model in a different school setting or creating one from a review of what has been done elsewhere, project members create new projects on their own.

Planning recruitment and retention strategies. The BYFP identified a broad range of groups with a stake in school safety as prospective participants, including students, teachers, parents, police officers, and neighborhood organizations. They recruited people from most of these groups but were unable to keep many of them involved. As a result, most of the project's members were students and a few teachers.

In planning their safety projects, schools should develop strategies for recruiting project members and for sustaining their involvement. These steps can include having more than one person assigned to recruit members, thereby mitigating the effects of staff turnover. Schools like I.S. 275, where parents are generally not involved in school activities, should also develop recruitment strategies specifically for attracting parents. Information about how similar schools have recruited participants can help in developing these strategies.

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[22] For example, the Blueprints for Violence Prevention project, developed by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado at Boulder, has reviewed more than 600 programs and identified 11 prevention and intervention programs that have been effective in reducing adolescent violent crime, aggression, delinquency, and substance abuse. The initiative has also identified 21 "promising programs." See http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints for more information about this project.

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